FOUR SHOWS OF FRIVOLITY

BY FRANKLIN FYLES.

New York, Feb. —The drama of dignity makes no competition with the four shows of frivolity that are brought into Broadway this week. The least deserving of these is "Tim Sullivan's Chowder." But it is so singular that, newsmonger that I am, I give it place at the top of the column. Timothy D. Sullivan, formerly congressman, now next-to-boss of Tammany, and always the Big Tim of dominance in the politics of the Bowery section, owns three theatres in New York. One is devoted to legitimate drama, and there "The Man of the Hour," with its theme of graft in politics, and with Big Tim depicted as an enemy to Boss Murphy and friend to Mayor McClellan, is holding the stage. His two other theatres are given over to burlesque, and between them he divides a fortnight of "Tim Sullivan's Chowder." The title is self-explanatory to New Yorkers. Big Tim reaches the hearts of his voters through their stomachs. One of his several annual blowouts is a chowder excursion for Bowery families to Coney Island, when he fills thousands of men and women with clams and beer. How can they beat him? They don't try to. However, being a very practical politician, he endeavors to turn his purchases of clams and beer into the utmost possible amount of popularity. Hence the play of "Tim Sullivan's Chowder."

"I was curious to see whether Big Tim would yield to vanity, and have himself portrayed as the handsome man that he is. No. The "Tim Sullivan, politician," in the play is a fat, squat, grotesque Irishman who, within five minutes after the curtain is up, spits colloquially into the face of Guggenheimer, his German political opponent, and is spit at with equal fluency by Guggenheimer. You and I may think it nothing but nauseous when stage dialoguists, in the excitement of salivine speech, make squirtguns of their mouths; but what are we against the rabbles which laugh. In this case—for Big Tim is astute, mind you, and does not in his Irish enthusiasm forget that Germans vote abundantly in the Bowery district—Guggenheim is as effectual a spatterer as Sullivan, and the contest is a draw.

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Essentially, "Tim Sullivan's Chowder" is merely one more of the burlesques that make the rounds of the concert halls. I wouldn't think of advising Mr. Sullivan in a matter of political tact; and, of course, women don't vote; yet mightn't some of his voters' wives and daughters get miffed when they see the twenty show girls representing them at a Sullivan chowder, and wearing no petticoats betwixt their short outer skirts and themselves? Nor would I set up my judgment against his when he lets a woman, assumedly the wife of one voter and mother of an indefinite number, slowly disrobe herself in the course of some feats of contortion, taking off one garment after another, until she arrives at professional modesty in the conventional guise of an acrobat.

An unusual thing in Big Tim's show is that the girls grin. In burlesques of this grade, as you may not know, the dental smile of the ballet-chorus on the upper levels is not ordinarily seen. The burlesquers may be holding quiescent cuds of gum, and don't want to lose them, but they look as though they were biting unamiable nails with grouchy teeth. It is different with Big Tim's girls. Evidently they have stuck their gum on the seamy side of the scenery, or poked their nails into crevices, in order to operate a genial grin upon the audience. I wonder if the stage bulletin board bears an order for open-mouthed welcome to members of Sullivan clubs. The front rows were filled, the night I was there, by a hundred bright, brisk, Sullivanish fellows, and every one might readily have believed that one or another of the girls had picked him out to dote on. Kissing babies is an old campaign device. Googooing voters, by the alluring proxy of show girls, is new.

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Of the three polite musical plays, "The Rose of the Alhambra," and "The Girl and the Governor" are of American make, and "The Little Michus" come from Paris by the way of London. How easy play writing seems when a successful example is in mind; and that is true especially of "The Little Michus" because the stuff of it is piffle and twaddle. Two girls are supposedly twins, but really one only is the child of the apparent parents, the other having been baby-farmed out to them by her army general father. It would seem that when Gilbert made so much fun with Little Buttercup "mixing these children up" in "Pinafore," the librettists would cease to make use of changelings; but they don't, and here they are again, with the mere variation of detail that the confusion arose from giving the babies a bath together, and there wasn't so much as a pinhead birthmark by which to tell which was which.

If you had thought out that complication for the start of a play, of course your next step would be to create two lovers for the girls. It couldn't have required genius in Duval and Van Loo, the authors of the original French comedy, to decide that the wooer of the low-born Rose Marie Michu should be a peasant, and that he who courted the high-born Marie Michu should be a gallant lieutenant in the army. When a London manager chose this play to make over into a musical show he had it adapted by an English jobber, but went to Andre Messager, a conductor at the Paris Grand opera house, for tunes; and these tunes contain all the merit that makes the material of "The Little Michus" uncommonly valuable. However, they are sung so badly in the New York performance that barely half of their quality gets to the audience.

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How, then, does "The Little Michus" pull through its difficulties? George Graves is the reason. He had been for many years an actor in English provincial obscurity when the role of the general in search of a daughter was given to him, and he was privileged to do anything and everything he could think of to render it amusing. I don't know that this was so, yet I firmly believe it, for the character is utterly at variance with all else in the play, is extended with what we call "gags" and the English call "wheezes," and is much like a monologue built up slowly by a vaudeville entertainer. I have seen Sam Bernard, Pete Dailey and DeWolf Hopper develop a part in that way from nonentity to dominance. No doubt Graves had acquired a large collection of comicalities during his provincial travels, and these were new to London, where his fun—a mixture of buffoonery and racy humor—gave a vigorous life to the piece for two years. He has hit New York's bulls-eye hard. I imagine that he has fired himself off completely, using up all his powder and ball, and hereafter will scatter his fire over the target; but for the time being he is in the front line of our grotesque comedians, hindered by inability to even attempt to sing, but quite the equal of Hopper, Daniels, DeAngelis or Bernard as a combined jester and clown.

The first night of "The Little Michus" recalled the long-ago first night of "Pinafire" by something else than the mixing up of babies. Both plays were introduced here by ill-chosen and unprepared companies. Sir Joseph and Little Buttercup were Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Whiffin, who could act but couldn't sing; Ralph and Josephine were amateurs who could sing but couldn't act; and when the curtain fell the rights for this country wouldn't have brought a thousand dollars, even if there had been an international copyright then to protect them. "The Little Michus" was endangered at the outset by a hasty decision to perform it sooner than had been expected. The Michu girls needed small soubrettes able to sing like prima donnas, and resembling each other. Suitable looks and ability were not immediately available. Two makeshifts were picked out of the chorus, and this didn't turn out to be one of those cases—usually prearranged—of talent discovered surprisingly. The chorus pair, poor, frightened little creatures, sang off key as to one and discordantly as to the other, while their futile efforts to act would have disgraced amateurs at a charity entertainment. Then, when the audience had got into a mood to ridicule, the feminine chorus came on in Empire gowns, the very tallest girl wearing the skirt which, probably, had been cut for one of the short girls drafted out to play the Michu roles; for the usually stately dresss ended at her calves, making her a sight to start a guffaw. But at that moment the new comedian, Graves, divulged himself in an extravagantly grotesque caricature, and turned the merriment from failure toward success. After the first laughter at his appearance had exhausted itself, he renewed it by beginning to utter arrant nonsense in a quaint way. "Don't touch that," he exclaimed, with a shrink and a shudder, as some one touched a piece of fur on his absurd uniform; "that's from the skin of a gazecker—rarest of animals—found only on the apexes of the Andes—hunted on stilts—shot with airguns," and so on through a foolish rigmarole, ending with the irrevelant assertion that "a boil in the pot is worth two on the neck."

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Actors are the queerest of human beings. One singularity is that they don't know when they are cheeky. If they did, probably they couldn't be actors. Here was this Mr. Graves, making a tremendous hit; yet, because others in the company were making misses, thereby preventing the play as a whole from going as well as it had gone in London, he egotistically took the blame all on himself along with the praise.

"I thank you for your kindness to me," he said, in response to a call (and please note the personal pronouns), "but it is something of a shock to me. I assure you, when some of the things that scored in London don't in New York. I shall endeavor to learn your ways, and earn your additional appreciation."

The funny fellow was giving hilarious satisfaction, and perhaps really believing that he hated to talk about himself, yet he was so well convinced that he was the whole blooming show as to apologize quite seriously for other faults than his own. Permit me to reiterate, that actors are the queerest of human beings.

Lack of original novelty is what ails all the week's musical plays. "The Rose of the Alhambra" and "The Girl and the Governor" are quite as scant in newness as "The Little Michus," and, like it, they are both helped out by their music. Yet if you have an odd scheme in your head for a libretto, but not the money in your pocket to pay for an experiment, there is no probable use in spending time on it, because you wouldn't be likely to find a manager to produce it at his own risk. Why do you think Harry B. Smith goes on turning out half a dozen librettos annually without ever striking out from conventionality? Believe me, it isn't because he hasn't the ability to freshen the staleness. The reason is that he produces what is demanded of him. Other authors follow his thrifty example. I have no doubt that a hundred rounders, on the opening night of "The Girl and the Governor," were astonished to see, on looking at the program at the end of the act, that it wasn't the writing of Harry B. Smith, but of S. M. Brenner, a stranger; and it seemed as though, if Mr. Brenner really had made it, he had got his hands on Mr. Smith's set of stencil plates, rubber stamps and other tools of rapid work in the libretto trade. For there was the principal comedian, Jefferson DeAngelis, again the potentate of an isolated country, beset as ever by an amorous old maid and desirous of marrying a girl tourist who disliked him.

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However, this was thoroughly a Jeff DeAngelis show, and in that way gave good satisfaction. If he had never been seen in Broadway before, he would arouse much the same feelings that Mr. Graves does—resentment in those who regard him as foolish only, and approbation in those who deem him funny also. DeAngelis is not as glib of gab as Graves, but their humor is on a par in their "gagging," and the American is an acrobatic dancer, while the Englishman doesn't dance at all. His antics are familiar, every one, and are incidental to a fandango, a serenade and other Spanish things, for the scenes are in South America. The story goes that the unwilling girl pretends to be a shrew, and fights him like a vicious cat when he tries to fondle her; so he hires a young fellow—who chances to be her congenial lover—to tame her by a method of endearments. He makes that amusing throughout a fandango, a serenade a fete and other Spanish things, for the scenes are in South America 300 years ago. Joseph C. Miron's bass voice and grim face have served for a hundred pirates and bandits, but there they are diverted to an Indian medicine man, who sells love potions to the governor; also, to the amorous old maid—with travesties of Indian music by Julian Edwards. There is a comforting deviation in the yearning woman. Not in the language, though, for she pursues the governor, and is repulsed, with talk indicating that she is the outlandishly ugly old creature rarely absent from musical farces. But Anna Boyd is permitted to rogue, powder and patch her handsome face absurdly, yet stop short of disfiguring it.

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Would to heaven that Anna Boyd's beautification of the lovesick freak woman means her abolition from the stage. Perhaps it does, for there is a similarly written Spanish duenna in "The Rose of the Alhambra," played by Isabelle Winloche, naturally plain of face, but not made artificially grotesque. It is not unintentionally that Charles Emerson Cooke wrote this comic opera like a hundred others, for evidently he tried to make it more so. He is convinced that there is a reactionary party among the people who go to theatres, and that its cry is: "Death to modern musical farce—life to old-time comic opera!" Therefore, he reenlivens a bandit chief as heavily basso as Henry Norman can make him. This fellow and his band contrive to get into a Spanish town, in accordance with a legend once written by Washington Irving, and that is a good thing, because it leads to the best musical number in the score. The chance for fanciful contrast in a song that starts as a holy chant, and ends as a rollicking bandits' chorus, has been utilized by Composer Lucius Hosmer, and is vocalized effectually by a good complement of singers.

There is hardly anything to describe in "The Rose of the Alhambra," and that isn't saying it is scant in merits. Mr. Cooke wrote it for Lillian Blauvelt, the grand opera prima donna, and she visited several cities with it. Then she engaged herself at Joe Weber's to sing in operatic travesty. She isn't missed, for Agnes Cain Brown has a hardly less admirable voice, besides the youth and vivacity needed to act a Spanish girl, who has a young royal page for a serenading lover. Did I say there is a hard-luck king? Well, of course there is. He and a vocally worthy friar steal the page's mandolin, and chase him away from under the balcony, preparatory to a raid on the maid; but she is tricky, too, and poses her duenna in her stead; and of such like matter is the libretto written in the reactionary spirit. Taking that view of the entertainment, it is a supply to meet a demand satisfactorily.

HARTMANN'S RETURN.

Program for Recital to Be Given Friday Evening.

Arthur Hartmann, the talented violinist who was heard here the last of January, fills a return engagement next Friday evening at the First Congregational church. Mr. Hartmann is accompanied by Adolph Borschke, whose piano numbers were second only to the violinist's best efforts. They will present the following program:

Pibroch ..... MacKenzie.
(a) Rhapsodie.
(b) Caprice (variations).
(c) Dance.
Arthur Hartmann.

Polonaise ..... Chopin
Adolph Borschke.

Ciaconna (by request) ..... Bach
Arthur Hartmann.

(a) Romance ..... Fini Henriques
(b) "Tango" (Spanish dance).....Arbos
Arthur Hartmann.

Paraphrase:
"Engen Onegin"...Tschaikowsky Pabst
Adolph Borschke.

(a) Berceuse ..... Theo. Holland
(Ledicated to Arthur Hartmann.)
(b) Zephyr ..... Hubay
Arthur Hartmann.

NEW BOOKS IN LIBRARY.

The public library will within a few weeks inaugurate a 10-cent fiction loan collection, after the system in use in many public libraries of the United States. Duplicate copies of popular fiction already on the library shelves will be in the library for loan to patrons at 10 cents a week. These books, after paying for themselves, will become the property of the library.

The following thirty volumes will be added to the public library Monday morning, Feb. 11, 1907:

Miscellaneous.

Arnold—"Merops."
Badeker—"Palestine and Syria."
Buck and Morris—"Narrative Writing."
Chancellor—"Washington Word List."
Colles—"Mica and the Mica Industry."
Dargan—"Lords and Lovers."
Gasquet—"Lord Acton."
Grecne—Plays and poems (2 vols.).
Henderson—"Scottish Vernacular History."
Leigh—"Edgar Allen Poe."
Merington—"Captain Letterblair."
Perry—"Walt Whitman."
Review Publishing Company—"Oriental Rugs and Carpets."
Riedl—"Hungarian Literature."
Simmons—"New Tables of Stone."
Trevelyan—"Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith."
Wilde—Plays, vol. 3.

Fiction.

Ade—"In Pastures New."
Dudeney—"Battle of the Weak."
Hill—"Pettison Twins."
King—"Medal of Honor."
Parker—"Adventurer of the North."
Phillips—"Red Saunders' Pets."

Children's Books.

Carroll—"Around the World."
Deland—"Little Son of Sunshine."
Freeman—"In Colonial Times."
Goss—"Jack Alden."
Perry—"Tora's Happy Day."
Tomlinson—"Young Rangers."